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## BOOK REVIEW

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*Digest of "Alcoholism and Mental Depression."* By Dr. PIERRE JANET.  
Read August 7, 1915, before the Academy of Moral and Political  
Sciences, Paris, as published in *Revue Internationale de Sociologie*,  
October, 1915.

Despite the many studies of Alcoholism the envisagement of the subject is not yet complete. The major portion of these studies have to do with alcohol, and against its production and consumption legal measures are proposed. But this is superficial symptomatic treatment rather than etiological. It is necessary to study the alcoholic and his malady in order to attempt a cure. It is a difficult subject, one to be approached with pity and compassion for the unfortunates.

Psychologically the alcoholic is more than a drinker of alcohol,—not a mere drunkard. Intoxication or inebriation is a rapidly developed disturbance of normal thought and conduct by absorption of alcohol,—an abnormal state produced in a normal individual. The alcoholic on the contrary does not become inebriated; he is an individual who has need of alcohol to become normal, yet he may know well the danger he runs in trying to satisfy this craving, as well as the expense he incurs and the family suffering he causes. He resists and promises family and friends to quit, but to no avail, though he seek medical assistance to quit. He fails to quit simply because the demand for the drink exceeds his resistance powers. Therefore we may define an alcoholic as one who needs alcohol to become normal and with whom this need is irresistible.

Whence this need and why its irresistibility is the true moral problem of alcoholism. An incident taken from my medical experience quite accurately depicts the case. A young physician of forty years, in the last stages of alcoholism, gave to me the history of his terrible passion for alcohol:

"From my youth," said he, "I was subject to a very painful malady. Occasionally, every year or two years, I fell into a state of profound melancholy and for several months would become incapable of doing things, of speaking, and especially of making decisions. The smallest act demanded extraordinary and painful efforts. I suffered keen moral torture because of a terrible contempt for myself and a feeling of moral shame. It seemed I had become the lowest of men and would befoul any place I entered. One can scarcely imagine what one suffers in such a state. I had in vain tried various treatments. One day a group of students sought me out at one of those worst moments and took me to a university fête. They dragged me along and forced me to drink almost in spite of myself. The result was extraordinary. After heavy consumption of alcoholic drinks I was not inebriated but felt myself becoming more and more normal. The veil which had covered my head was rent; it seemed as though I was reborn, that I began a new life. I was again able to talk and act, and my feeling of happiness became as exaggerated as had previously been the feeling of shame. I returned home without trouble, and was able to digest and to sleep as I long had not been able to do. I awoke cured. It was inevitable that

when the horrible melancholy began again some days later that I hurriedly sought the remedy, at first with curiosity, then with frenzy. I have never since been able to check myself."

Such cases can be multiplied; and this same evolution is met in the development of other impulsions towards drugs,—opium, morphine, and even to flight, but above all to drink.

The initial pathological condition is a state of mental depression. There is no destruction or disturbance of function or faculty but simply that these functions or faculties remain in potential state without culminating in action. The old psychology was static, describing faculties *per se* and seemed to take it for granted that because a faculty existed it was able to functionize. An advancement of psychology, especially in mental diseases, is that it has become dynamic, and concerns itself more with the functionizing of faculties and with what I have previously termed *psychological tension*. The degree of this tension or the elevation of the mental plane depends not upon the number of tendencies possessed by the individuals but upon the number and degree of perfection tendencies which find fruition in functionizing. The oscillations of this tension have great importance. They explain not only a large number of mental diseases but the wide variations of sleep and sleeplessness, rest and fatigue, as well as the emotions, which are all variations of the psychological tension.

Depression is a lowering of the psychological tension much below that necessary for adaptation to the environment of the individual. This depression determines a host of very curious phenomena, of impotency of action, especially of the higher and more complex ones, of agitations, of horrible feelings of abasement, and of desperate efforts to escape this state.

Opposed to these depressions there is in these oscillations another essential phenomenon,—excitement. Excitement is essentially a rapid elevation of the psychological tension; it admits of the inversed phenomena of the precedents, that is to say, of the acts of adaptation rightly performed, and of tranquillity. The faculties functionize without distress, painful feelings make way to pleasurable ones, and there is joy, interest, confidence, independence.

The absorption of certain substances, certain poisons, among which alcohol is the best known, produces excitement. Alcoholic excitement occurs even with the normal individual, but is not very remarkable and is of short duration, because the psychological tension already high is susceptible of small heightening before drunkenness ensues. But with the depressed individual excitement raises the psychological tension to the normal level. Alcohol which disturbs speech and prevents sleep in the normal man restores speech to the timid depressed one and restores sleep to the insomniac. Alcohol thus delivers the depressed one from horrible torture, and when he relapses puts before him temptations incomprehensible to the normal individual.

It cannot be said this is dipsomania, and not common alcoholism. Too often we make this distinction. They are of the same genus in which are many varieties. Dipsomania has been distinguished because of the periodicity of the depression. These alternations are absent in the alcoholic. Chronic depressions, light or profound, are more common than one might suppose, at least for some years, which produce by the same mechanism as does dipsomania a need for exciting drink.

It is easy to show that alcoholism and mental depression originate in the same conditions. Individuals who for years resist the temptation to drink even in the midst of it will often become alcoholics following

an infectious disease, typhoid fever or light attack of tuberculosis, just as one becomes depressed following physical or mental overwork, or following a change of surroundings, a quarrel, a disappointment in love, etc. Alcoholism acts as do all impulsions of the depressed, it diminishes with simple and easy life and augments with the higher and more trying activities. Alcoholism, like dipsomania, is a consequence of depression. I may say without here being able to demonstrate, that the same is true of that other great scourge of France, depopulation. I have reached a conclusion which may appear strange; it is that a people who alcoholize themselves, and who have no more children, is a people attacked by a sort of collective mental disease, a very general mental depression. Infectious diseases, intoxicants, alcoholism of parents with its circle of vicious results, unwholesome habitations, undernourishment, factory life, all doubtless play important rôles. Overwork, especially mental overwork peculiar to our epoch plays a chief rôle. Philosophical ideas as to equality of men have leveled ambitions. That our system of higher education is not entirely blameless is shown by numberless pathological observations. It is a delicate subject; but let me suggest: Formerly mental tension was not high and rested in beliefs quite agreeable and easy. We now repeatedly say that everybody should apply reason to his beliefs and accept as true only what seems evidently such. This is very right and beautiful; but do all little garçons have the intellect of Descartes? This is not to condemn or regret the progress of democracy or the liberty of thought, but it is to say that they are difficult and costly advancements, paid for by overwork and depression.

Placing alcoholism and even depopulation as a result of profound mental disturbances and depression caused by a diminution of vitality and overwork should not cause us to despair of applying successful therapeutics. Alcoholism must be combatted by reducing it and rendering the use of alcohol difficult. The legal measures are good if courageously enforced; but such is difficult. Selfish interests group around alcohol and these combat the enforcement of legal measures to reduce alcohol consumption. The unfortunate alcoholics themselves because of their suffering will continue to intoxicate themselves.

Besides, it is a question if the suppression of alcohol will cure the disease. Ordinarily the suppression of one excitant simply forces the diseased to seek another. We might well regard with distrust opium, cocaine, and other powerful excitants.

We have heard discussion of the excellent results of the suppression of alcohol in Russia. In medical practice things do not happen so simply. Great emotions, great dangers, energetic acts greatly heighten the courage of depressed individuals, and war is a great excitant. At this moment there are fewer depressed in Paris than under normal conditions and many ordinarily depressed maintain themselves on a superior plane. Hence the suppression of alcohol is more easily tolerated than in calm periods. We should profit by the occasion and accept the unique benefit of a horrible war. This is the time or never to suppress absinthe, alcohol, cabarets, distilleries, and obtain quickly when it will pass unnoticed this suppression which will not obtain later without great opposition and suffering.

But this alone will not suffice. Legal steps against alcohol are but symptomatic therapeutics the complete success of which would be only contingent. Some day we must go further and deal with the fundamental evil,—mental depression. We must deal with the social (the most essential) aspects of the problem not alone with the legal. Better

housing conditions, cleaner air, are factors in the therapeutics of depression and alcoholism. Sufficient nourishment of workmen and the advancement of popular hygiene promise much.

Besides physical hygiene some day we will concern ourselves with moral hygiene. In conserving social advancement overwork must be prevented. To diminish social conflicts and rapid aspirations for equality and dangerous ambitions, to inspire a certain respect for authority and reconcile the irreconcilable, liberty of thought and tranquillity of belief, these are problems closely associated with that of alcoholism and depopulation.

The advancement of psychological and social sciences will one day formulate the rules of this special hygiene of the mind and the academy of moral sciences will then be the great council of moral hygiene. In the meantime do not despair. Individual depressions frequently yield to treatment,—those of the people may be cured also.

Independence, Missouri.

FREDERICK M. SMITH.

## BOOK NOTES

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*Evolution and the war.* By P. CHALMERS MITCHELL. London, John Murray, 1915. 114 p.

This is a brilliant and original book by a well-known biologist. He discusses war and the struggle for existence, this latter struggle among animals, nationality and race, the production of a nationality, and selective factors, the foundations of nationality, with epigenetic features. The main feature of the book is its rather radical denial of the existence or at least the importance of psychic heredity. Part of it he thinks is due to suggestion and that if people never knew the traits of their progenitors they would often never develop them. The very fact of educability suggests that man is far more plastic to develop in individual directions, quite apart from his ancestry, than animals are. He would not perhaps say the mind is a *tabula rasa*, but all kinds of possibilities are open. He holds that consciousness transforms all qualities and faculties acquired by human beings from the animal world, and that is the foundation of free and intelligent existence. He holds Kant responsible for what he calls "the dreaming megalomania that has destroyed the German sense of reality and has made German *Kultur* the enemy of the human race." Nietzsche was only a terminal flower of this poisonous and sterile idealism. Bernard Shaw is "only Nietzsche grinning through a horse collar." As against Darwin he urges "that the moral law is as real and external to man as the starry vault. It has no secure seat in any single man or any single nation." It is not inborn but inherited from traditions and customs in literature and religion. Its creation and subsistence is the crowning glory of man and his consciousness of it puts him in a high place above the animal world. The struggle for existence, therefore, does not apply to man. Modern nations are not units of the same order as the units of the animal and vegetable kingdom from which the law of the struggle for existence is a supposed inference. Dar-